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DYING AND DEATH: A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

by Alexandre Chaligne

Alexandre Chaligne, a TMI Professional Member since 2001, owns the Aromansse holistic health and meditation studio in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He has attended the GATEWAY VOYAGE®, GUIDELINES®, LIFELINE®, MC2, EXPLORATION 27®, and STARLINES. Alexandre has also volunteered in palliative care in his native France since 1997 and at the Riverview Health Centre in Winnipeg since 2002. The GOING HOME® series is the core of the programs that Alexandre provides as resources for healthy people, as well as for terminally ill people and their loved ones. In January 2006 he opened the Riverton Retreat Center to offer what he calls “pre-palliative care.” Riverton is a sacred space in which to relax, reenergize, and address unfinished business before going into a palliative care facility. Here Alexandre shares the insights and knowledge that he has acquired from his work with the living and the dying.

In January 2002, I started volunteering at the palliative care center at the Riverview complex. After delivering the GOING HOME program for several weeks to doctors and to the manager of the palliative care center, we sent a team of volunteers (who had taken the program at an earlier date) to visit patients twice a week in the forty-bed palliative care unit.

We started with a Hemi-Sync® menu composed of METAMUSIC®, plus MIND FOOD®, HUMAN PLUS®, and of course GOING HOME. We found the most popular titles were *Pain Control, Restorative Sleep, Brain: Support & Maintenance, Lungs: Support & Maintenance, Spirit Journey, Baroque Garden, and Higher*.

During the first year, we had great success with GOING HOME because the life span of people at the Riverview palliative care unit was at least six weeks. This allowed people to pass from one emotional stage to another, as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described, and to arrive at the fourth or fifth week able to speak about death. In some cases, volunteers gently questioned patients as to why they were using their precious few weeks or even days on things like watching television all day. Unfortunately, over the course of our study, the average life span in the palliative care centers decreased to approximately three weeks. That made it more difficult to achieve our goal: death as a process of awareness. The following are “real-life” examples of the volunteers’ work and experiences:

Experience 1

Peter, a forty-five-year-old man who had read DYING AND DEATH: A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY by Alexandre Chaligne, a Hemi-Sync Palliative Care flyer, asked his nurse to call

for more information. I went to visit him, and after a few minutes he agreed to try the tape called *Lungs: Support & Maintenance*, as he had a hard time breathing due to his lung cancer. I left the tape with him for the rest of the day.

The next morning he came to see me, saying he was very surprised with the results of Hemi-Sync, and asked me to tell him more about other Hemi-Sync programs. While I was explaining GOING HOME, he listened with great attention and asked me a lot of questions about my beliefs and experiences. But at the end of the conversation, he said that it was too early for him and he didn't want to die. A few weeks after he started the tapes, I sensed negative feelings toward me, and he began to miss appointments. One morning, frustrated with the situation and knowing his health was worsening from day to day, I burst into his room and told him bluntly that avoidance of me would not change the fact that he was indeed going to die. There were only two choices: dying in fear with mental and physical pain or transforming his death into an experience of awareness and controlling all the steps of the process. He was stunned at my outburst, and while I was making a brisk departure, he ran after me in the hallway saying that I was right and he was ready to do GOING HOME.

I came to the unit to listen to tapes with him every morning and to prompt him to talk about his experiences. He said that he really liked the program because he could talk about his fear of dying but could only do that with me, since his family was not ready to let him go. He traveled through Focus 10 and 20 without any problems and even found that funny. The day he was introduced to Focus 21 was unforgettable. He had no clue what it was about. After that tape, he was only willing to travel up to Focus 21. I found that very interesting because he had felt completely lost in Locale 2.

I urged him to continue to do tapes beyond Focus 21 and told him that I would be with him until Focus 27 even if he couldn't see me. A few days after finally becoming comfortable with his journey into Focus 27, he died peacefully without too many fears and especially without any physical pain.

Experience 2

Henri and Fanny were a couple from Quebec who didn't speak English fluently. They welcomed my presence because I was able to translate and mediate between them and the hospital staff. Both of them were very upset by chemotherapy's effects on Henri. He refused any pain medication for his brain tumor because it caused him to completely lose his awareness.

The medical team thought Henri was the ideal patient to work with to demonstrate what Hemi-Sync was really all about. Right away, I installed a sound system where he could continually play some METAMUSIC and the *Pain Control* CD, and the results were impressive. Two weeks of tension that had built up between the nurses, the doctors, and the couple

disappeared almost instantaneously. We tried to start GOING HOME, but Fanny was not ready to see her forty-five-year-old husband in the process of dying so young, so she kept finding excuses to retard the program. Two weeks later they were transferred outside the province to be in Montreal, where he could be with his family.

Fanny came to see me before leaving to get a set of tapes to continue the same Hemi-Sync "treatment." A few days before Henri's death, Fanny played the tape Higher and later told us that although Henri endured pains and absent-minded moments, he took his last breaths with a smile on his face. Fanny thought that Hemi-Sync sounds helped them to be more relaxed and especially helped them to speak about death—even though they thought it would never happen to them in their lives, only to others.

Over the past two years, Terri has been one of the Aromansse volunteers with the GOING HOME program offered at the Riverview Health Centre Palliative Care Unit. She shared with me the following two experiences from sessions at Riverview.

Experience 3

Doris was in her seventies. She had lived a full and active life. Her husband had transitioned about eighteen months earlier. Her support network included a sibling, nieces and nephews, and friends. Terri sensed from her that none of them wanted to talk with her about the dying process. During a visit, Doris expressed an interest in working through the GOING HOME program.

Terri visited with her on a weekly basis, and over a period of six weeks they listened to the following tapes from GOING HOME: *Flying Free, Remove and Release, Edge of Here and Now, Touring the Interstate, Moment of Revelation, and Freedom Flight*.

After each session Doris opened up more and more and said she found the tapes to be very enlightening. She discussed belief systems with Terri and how limiting society is. She said she looked forward to Terri's visits and—even as she became very weak—she wanted to continue with the program. She really felt she was able to let go of a lot of things, especially after Remove and Release. As Doris progressed through the tapes, she expressed how much she enjoyed them and how she truly felt at peace.

Experience 4

Terri's other case was a woman in her fifties who was anxious to talk about dying since she was unable to discuss it with her family. This woman was very interested in proceeding with the GOING HOME program. She and Terri spoke about the whole process of dying. She opened up about her life and her relationships, how she felt, and her most important concerns. Leaving the family behind was her most difficult issue.

Her most dramatic experience was with Flying Free. She really enjoyed it and connected with a bird called “Willie” during the exercise. That became an important aspect of her transition process. Her husband was named Willie, and when she perceived “Willie” during her meditation, she knew that everything was going to be okay. Terri saw her again just after she had completed tests. She was unable to concentrate on the tapes because she was engaged with visitors. Shortly afterward she made her transition. She had realized that she could move on, and “Willie” was certainly waiting to fly with her on her new journey.

In September 2002, the palliative care center asked me to participate in the provincial conference about palliative care and explain our program to other Canadian palliative care centers. Although we had positive experiences to report, results were not as good as we had thought they would be. Unfortunately, palliative care centers are looked upon as places where people go with the hope of feeling better and not as places to end our journey here on earth. Nurses and doctors are usually not trained to talk openly about death or to show dying people that they are more than their physical bodies. Our volunteers found this situation unrealistic because of the “hospital-like” surroundings and the intention to heal and make better, as opposed to what palliative care should be: a place where people can find psychological and spiritual help, as well as health support, while ending their earth journey.

In an effort to bridge the gap between those actually dying and the living, I decided to deliver the *GOING HOME* program to nondying people at our meditation school. I knew the existing *GOING HOME* program would not be sufficient for my intended audience. Therefore, after careful consideration and extensive consultation with focus groups, I created a six-day program called the *Dying & Living Program*, or *Voyage to the Other Side*. *GOING HOME* became the foundation on which I built different meditative and psychological techniques to prepare ourselves to die wherever, whenever, and to try to open our belief systems. Eleanor, the coordinator of the Going Home Association, had the opportunity to share her knowledge of death and dying with her family shortly thereafter when her dad passed away. Here is the story in her own words:

“After an intense week of learning about and experiencing altered states of consciousness, I left the program very confident in my beliefs—that there is definitely existence after human physical death and that I knew the best route to follow when I crossed over. I used all of this strength and knowledge immediately after the program, as my dad passed away the next day. “When I came home from the program on Saturday evening, I learned that my dad was in the hospital but was doing fine and had been moved to a regular ward. He was resting for the night, so my mom and I made plans to visit him together the next day.

My dad had been hospitalized many times over the previous seven years; therefore, we had no reason to believe this stay would be any different. He’d be released in a day or two. During our visit on Sunday, I didn’t feel the usual anxiety I experienced during his hospital stays. I now

saw my dad as so much more than his physical body. My mom, dad, and I had a very peaceful, enjoyable visit that Sunday afternoon, so I was surprised to get a call from my mom at 11:00 that evening. The hospital had called to say that Dad's breathing was labored and that family might want to come. My mom was almost apologetic in passing on this news, because we had been called to come to the hospital many times in the past. Somehow I knew that this time was different.

"The hospital was a half-hour drive and I was alone, so all the way there I 'talked' to my dad. I told him what I had learned and that life does go on. I told him what happens when we cross over and what to do, and then I spiritually grabbed his hand and took him up to Focus 27. I showed him my 'house' and that his favorite chair was there as well. I showed him that we could visit there, and he could do so many things . . . even go fishing (his favorite thing to do, but he hadn't been able to for many years). My dad was an anxious man, determined to hang on, and often expressed that he didn't want to die. He never shared his beliefs about death, and I believe he was afraid. I felt that my talking to him alleviated some of his fears and mine as well.

"I felt very 'connected' to spirit as I entered the hospital, and when I pressed the fifth-floor elevator button the elevator went past five, stopped at the sixth floor (the doors opened, then closed), then went back to the fifth floor. I felt this was a message from spirit, which gave me strength.

"When I entered the hospital room, my dad's breathing was very labored and he appeared unconscious. My mom, sister, and brother were already there, seated around the room, and previously I would have joined them against the wall, but I pulled a chair close to my dad and held his hand. This brought everyone else closer as well. We all had time to hold his hand or wipe his brow—and he was conscious after all, proven by a groan or a slight squeeze of his hand. When I held my dad's hand I would privately 'talk' to him spiritually and show him the route to Focus 27. I shared visions of his past pets and old fishing boat in 27, and although I didn't have the opportunity to do much, I felt that I had made a difference somehow. My dad passed away a few hours later.

"At the end of that night, we were standing around the hospital parking lot, about to go to our various cars, and the light above us went out. I said, 'Maybe that's Dad, telling us that he's okay?' My family laughed, and my mom said that the light had been burned out for weeks (my dad had been in the hospital a few weeks earlier). I knew that the light going out was a message, from my dad or someone else.

"I felt a great deal of strength and calmness during the next few days, and I know that wouldn't have been the case if I hadn't taken the *Dying & Living* Program. I took care of all the arrangements, but listened carefully to accommodate everyone's wishes as well as possible.

All of the events turned out to be wonderful tributes to my dad, which also brought our family closer together. I am amazed at the timing of my participation in the Dying & Living Program. I feel that I helped my dad cross over safely, and I now know that the program benefited my dad, my family, and me."

Society at large may think that we have plenty of time to prepare for death, yet death has no timetable. It may choose to arrive in our life at any moment after our birth, and our program puts it into context and prepares one for that inevitable and ultimate journey.

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